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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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SUBJECT: GOC "READY" TO SPRAY IN PARKS

1. (SBU) GOC Minister of Defense Jorge Alberto Uribe Echavarria informed the Ambassador on March 29 that the Government of Colombia is ready to initiate aerial eradication operations in Colombia's national parks and natural reserves. Spraying in the parks has been a particularly contentious counter-narcotics issue and a step that the GOC has avoided to date despite mounting evidence of increasing illicit cultivation within park boundaries.

2. (SBU) Spraying coca with glyphosate in national parks has been politically sensitive in Colombia. NAS Director will work closely with Colombian National Police Antinarcotics Director General Gomez Heredia to reduce the political cost of this important step forward. The NAS Director will also work closely with General Gomez to ensure that all necessary preparations are made in advance of final clearance from President Alvaro Uribe. A GOC inter-institutional scientific committee is finalizing environmental and social assessments for each park, as required by Colombian law before spraying may commence. The GOC continues to explore alternatives to spraying and plans to continue both forced and voluntary manual eradication in the parks when security conditions permit such operations.

3. (SBU) The next step is to prepare and forward a determination by the Secretary to Congress on spraying in the parks, as required by U.S. law before any Andean Counterdrug Initiative funds are used for such purposes. According to the 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Act, the Secretary must determine that spraying in the parks "is in

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accordance with Colombian laws and that there are no effective alternatives to reduce drug cultivation in these areas." Embassy has forwarded draft text to the Department via other channels.

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